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THE YOUTH OF GERMANY

BY CHARLES B. DYAR

THE question is often asked whether Germany is really and thoroughly Democratic and likely to remain so. It cannot be adequately answered without an inquiry into the temper and aspirations of the younger generation of Germany to-day, the generation which will rule and control the policies of the Germany of tomorrow. The German Constitution of Weimar is a liberal document. Its first article proclaims that the German Reich is a Republic and that the sovereignty is vested in the people. The President of the Republic is a Socialist and a man of the people. However, no amount of superficial indications which present themselves to the casual glance to-day should be permitted to obscure the ferment below from which the new Germany will in time emerge. It is a melancholy but indisputable fact that the trend of the academic youth of Germany is not toward Liberalism and Democracy but toward a revival of Prussianism with all its essential attributes. The educated youth of Germany to-day, the young men who will be Germany's statesmen, lawyers, doctors, scientists and technicians tomorrow, are reactionary in thought and purpose and look up to the ideals of a past which was rich in the glories which they have been taught to cherish.

The development of the German youth during the Great War was along lines not anticipated by statesmen and educators. In the beginning of the war, indeed, there was great enthusiasm among the youth. There were over a million volunteers; the German boys thronged into the various boy scout organizations where retired officers instructed them in the elements of military training; Pan-German patriotism was rampant; there was no trace of opposition to the war. As the war went on, however, fathers of families were called to the colors, many mothers took up war work, and young boys and girls advanced to positions bringing incomes far beyond that to which they had formerly been

accustomed, and the lack of restraining influence at home and in associations made itself felt in an increasing degree. Juvenile delinquency had increased 600 per cent in Prussia in 1917, and complaints of profligacy and waywardness of the youth became general. Even the military authorities were forced to take cognizance of this, and after the experience of the Battle of Ypres late in 1914, when two regiments of new recruits were wiped out, no further units composed exclusively of boys were organized; a certain percentage of older men was brigaded with each new unit in order to insure reliability. Efforts at home to check the wastefulness and waywardness of the youth were not particularly successful. In many parts of Germany the military authorities issued orders compelling youthful ammunition workers to deposit part of their wages in savings banks. A strike by these youths in the district of the Twelfth Army Corps in Magdeburg resulted in the withdrawal of the savings bank order. Late in the war the so-called Revolt of the Youth, which was a disturbing factor in Allied countries as well, had made substantial progress and laid the foundation for Radical movements to come. A noticeable tendency towards intransigency pervaded the youth at home. The revolution of November, 1918, fell seemingly on fertile ground.

It soon became evident, however, that in the general chaos and distress which prevailed in Germany after the retreat and disbandment of the great German Army the ideal of Democracy was lost sight of and youth inclined toward the two extremes of reaction and Communism. In December, 1918, the late Professor Liszt, a prominent German Democrat, complained bitterly of the failure of the German students to espouse the cause of the new Republic. He was unable to understand why the German students, who had in the past, and particularly in the inspiring but short-lived Revolution of 1848, stood in the front ranks of the strivers for unity and freedom, could hesitate to come to the support of a new Democracy which promised to do away with out-lived prejudice and privilege and to establish liberty, equality and fraternity in the Fatherland. The task of the German youth of 1918 was to liquidate the heritage of Bismarck, the nation of iron and blood, and to proclaim new ideals for the new Germany; but the inspiration of the moment was not caught, or if caught was

dulled by pressing physical want. No new leader was forthcoming whose example could inspire the multitude. The demagogues of reaction and communism vied with each other in ensnaring the bewildered youth.

The reasons for the present super-Nationalist attitude of the German students, which has been a cause of concern to many close observers of after-war Germany, are not difficult to find. Very many of the older students were officers in the war and practically all of them were in the army or some branch of war work. Those who were at the front, and that is the great majority, were involved in the desperate battles of the retreat before the Allied armies late in 1918. They had no time to ponder on the rapid developments at home, the collapse of Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary, and Ludendorff's demand for an immediate armistice. The students who returned from the front were readily open to the insidious argument of the defeated militarists, that the army had been knifed in the back by the people at home. They were prejudiced against the new Government which seemed to them responsible for the distress which prevailed at home. The revolution was made the scapegoat for the maladministration, graft and profiteering which had in fact grown up under the Imperial régime. The depreciation of the German mark and the consequent difficulty of providing for subsistence were laid at the door of the Republic. It is estimated that two-thirds of the German students are forced to do outside work to pay their way through the university, but this economic distress has been no check to chauvinism. The mode of thought of the students is that which prevailed in the universities before and during the war. The German universities have always been essentially conservative institutions. The same professors are lecturing to the German students to-day who instilled the ideals of Imperial Germany into the youth before the war. The same professors are teaching in the universities of Republican Germany who defended and extolled the policies and methods of the Imperial German Government and military authorities. On the occasion of a recent celebration of the anniversary of the Battle of Tannenberg, the degree of LL.D was conferred upon General Ludendorff by the University of Königsberg. The diploma

celebrates Ludendorff as the "Master of Generalship, the Liberator who freed our East Prussian soil from the plundering and burning Russian hordes, the Hero who protected with the sharp blows of his undefeated sword the German people, surrounded by a whole world of rapacious enemies, until it trusted in false words and forsook its unbroken Army and its strong leaders." In the high schools and academies the majority of the instructors are still reactionary, while in the lower schools democratic teachers have been able to establish themselves. It is clearly difficult for young men trained in the Prussian interpretation of history to become enthusiastic for a form of government which they were taught to look down upon as something inferior and un-Teutonic.

The German Nationalists were quick to see the possibilities of winning over the youth of Germany to their side. Very soon after the Armistice, favored by the unexpected forbearance of the people, they started an insidious campaign of propaganda among the youth which was all the more effective because of the utter lack of Republican propaganda in opposition. This Nationalist propaganda has been constantly developed and improved. The Nationalist leaders have devoted their time and energy to its perfection. Huge funds have been placed at their disposal by German industrial magnates. In a thousand different ways monarchist and chauvinist propaganda has been spread abroad. New juvenile pamphlets and newspapers have been published and widely distributed, in which the youth are exhorted to be mindful of the glories of the old Empire and to look forward to and prepare for the Day when retribution must be visited on France and Poland, and Germany is to get back all that has been unjustly taken away from her. The doctrine of revenge is preached openly. Particular attention has been paid to the various boy scout organizations, *Wandervogels*, etc., in many of which reactionary influence is now predominant. In a *Manual for the Guidance of Boy Scout Leaders*, published in Berlin in 1921, particular emphasis is laid on the value of "military exercises, military marching, 114 steps per minute, night sham battles on difficult ground, surprise attacks in military formation, military leaders to instruct the youth in military land- and woodcraft." Picture postcards with photographs of the ex-Kaiser, the ex-

Crown Prince and other members of the Hohenzollern family are now displayed in the windows of stationers all over Germany. Rally meetings for the youth, which are addressed by retired officers or other reactionary leaders, are of frequent occurrence and have a provocative effect. Prominent Generals like Ludendorff, Hoffmann, Lettow-Vorbeck, and Von der Goltz, take active part in militarist demonstrations the principal object of which is to make an impression on the youth.

The Nationalist propaganda has been successful far beyond the hopes of those who started it. It has been alike effective in the rural districts, which have always been strongholds of conservatism, and in the cities, where its success is more conspicuous. The juvenile organizations of the German People's Party have practically identified themselves with the Nationalist Youth, and reactionary influence is strong in many of the juvenile organizations of the great Clerical party. The more sanguine of the Nationalists are convinced that the instruments of Germany's revenge have already been found; the soberer leaders advise a policy of waiting and reserve until the new generation has taken its place in control of the State. The Kapp revolt in March, 1920, found the German students and the rest of the Nationalist Youth arrayed solidly on the side of the rebels who tried to overthrow the Republican Government. The students were prominent in all the fighting of those days, and their ruthlessness in combatting their own countrymen, the proletarian "enemy" who stood up for the Republic, provoked most bitter feeling. The Kapp revolt demonstrated that the students had alienated themselves from the masses of the people. They failed to respond to the instinctive resistance of the people to a plan to reinstall the old militaristic régime.

The attitude of the Nationalist Youth toward the Jews is a striking example of the intolerance which prevails in German reactionary circles. Uncompromising hatred of the Jews is one of the tenets of the reactionary creed. Jewish influence is blamed for the loss of the war and the corruption which followed. The Democratic Government is termed a Jewish gang and the new Republican flag a Jewish rag. The convention of the student corps at Eisenach in August, 1920, passed resolutions barring

all "non-Aryans" from membership in the student corps and expelling many Jews and Socialists who were members. The feudal student corps still adhere to the duelling and beer drinking which form part of their tradition. The student with gashed face and head is no less common than before the war.

Practically the only step in the direction of liberalism which has been taken by the German students since the war is the organization of self-governing bodies in the universities and of a national student convention for the whole of the country. Even the exclusive student corps have found it necessary to coöperate with other student organizations in matters which affect the student body. The student elections in January, 1921 showed Nationalist majorities ranging from 90 per cent in Giessen and 85 per cent in Königsberg to 66 per cent in Berlin. Delegations of all the feudal student corps were sent to the funeral of the ex-Kaiserin in Potsdam in May, 1921, and lent color to a ceremony which was conducted with all the pomp known to the old régime. American Quakers have extended their relief work to several of the German universities, but the students of the University of Erlangen, in Bavaria, declined the Quakers' offer to provide free board for needy students with the statement that the Quakers should first have the Peace Treaty revised.

The notion that America "betrayed" Germany at Versailles, and must be held to an accounting for it, is prevalent not only in reactionary circles. The Prussian Minister of Education, Conrad Haenisch, a Socialist, was forced to admit after two years in office that the new Republic had failed to win over the educated younger generation, and he rightly describes it as a question of life or death for the Republic to convert the mind workers to democracy. Very little, indeed, has been accomplished in this respect. Even the schoolbooks in use are for the most part the same as those used before the revolution, the expense of providing a complete set of new textbooks being almost prohibitive. The Republican Government has done little or nothing to attract new followers of democracy, and the political parties which profess to be democratic have failed dismally to instruct the youth in the precepts of democracy.

At the opposite end of the arena of German political strife

stand the ranks of the Proletarian Youth, on whose steadfastness the Republic must principally rely. The gap between the two rival armies is perilously wide, so wide, indeed, that it seems almost extravagant to hope that it can ever be bridged. The Proletarian Youth is divided in itself. The largest group adheres to the Social Democratic party and is on the whole anxious to learn and live democracy and is opposed to any return of autocracy and militarism. This group is chiefly controlled by the leaders of the party, is organized in order to serve the ends of that party, and has not yet distinguished itself by any action indicative of independence or new inspiration. The influence of the fresh forces is already being felt, nevertheless, and shows that the potentialities of the group are very great. In the eyes of the old leaders, however, the juveniles simply form the reservoir on which the party draws as time depletes its ranks. As far as Radicalism is concerned, the Social Democratic youth is committed to nothing but the gradual realization of the theories of scientific Socialism within the bounds of democracy.

The second group is called the Socialist Proletarian Youth, and is under the control of leaders of the Independent Socialist party. This is the most thoroughly revolutionary party in Germany and the most unequivocal and uncompromising adversary of chauvinism and imperialism. The juvenile group of the party has at times been very close to acceptance of Communism, but its ideals have become somewhat modified and chastened in the course of time. As is the case with the first group, these young men are for the most part handworkers and it is only in the few hours of recreation that they become acquainted with the political problems of the day. The socialistic parties accomplish a great deal in providing suitable opportunities for the enlightenment of the youth on political problems. A pronounced spirit of independence has manifested itself among the Socialist Proletarian Youth.

The third group includes the Communist Youth, the fervent advocates of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of Sovietism. Even in this group the experiences of two years, the apparent failure of Soviet Russia and the crushing of sporadic Communist uprisings in Germany, have had a sobering effect. Active participation in the Communist *Putsch* of April

of last year resulted in the sentencing of many youthful Communists to death or life-long imprisonment, the severity of the courts in dealing with these misled youths being in striking contrast to the leniency with which the students who took active and discreditable part in the Kapp *Putsch* were treated.

The entire Proletarian Youth can be depended upon to offer determined resistance to any attempt to reëstablish the monarchy. The various groups chafe under the restraint of leadership which is felt to be out of touch with the new time. They long for greater inspiration than can be furnished by older men whose chief concern is the establishment of party supremacy and whose chief claim to leadership consists in conversancy with the petty details of the parliamentary life of a past era.

The Democratic Youth stands alone in a difficult position between the two extremes of Nationalism and Radicalism. The catchwords of the Radicals of the Right and the Left have made heavy inroads on the Democratic Party and its juvenile organizations. Notwithstanding this a group of courageous Democrats stands firmly in the centre of the arena, bearing the brunt of attacks from two sides. Its sole recourse is to proclaim stoutly the great ideals of democracy which must gradually pervade the institutions of German public life if class and race war is not to run rampant. One of the leaders of the Democratic Youth is a striking figure, Ernst Lemmer, a student of Marburg University. Lemmer was disciplined by the university authorities in 1919 for venturing to attend a convention of the Democratic party. He is convinced that Germany can be saved only by conversion to democracy and has addressed himself with all the enthusiasm of youth to the difficult task of persuading the youth of Germany that the course of true patriotism can lie only in the direction of the spreading abroad of the spirit and ideas of the Weimar Constitution, the injection of life into the cold forms of that document, and the creation of true Democracy in society, commerce and polity. Dissatisfaction with the old leaders is particularly pronounced in the Democratic Youth and men like Lemmer seem destined to come to the front in time.

A few loose organizations like the Liberal Youth, which is somewhat akin to the Democratic Youth but is not connected

with any political party, and the Radical Reformers, who proclaim the independence of the youth from all elder authority, must also be taken into consideration. The former organization distinguished itself by a courageous attitude against chauvinist aims during the war, and the latter was prominent in the movement for pupils' councils in the schools and other radical school reforms which made some headway shortly after the Armistice but soon lost force.

The absence of conscription and the comparative inconspicuousness of military uniforms have a very important bearing on the temper of the youth. Compulsory military service was for a century one of the vertebral institutions of Prussia and Germany. German monarchs, statesmen, generals and professors have long sounded its praises. It was particularly as a means of education of the masculine youth, as a school of physical and moral training, that the merits of this institution were considered so excellent, Prominent pedagogues have pronounced conscription the pinnacle of the German system of education. Every healthy German boy of 19 entered upon his two years of military service in the consciousness of fulfilling a patriotic duty which his father had performed before him. The privilege of volunteer service for one year only was contingent on the passing of a severe examination which as a rule only boys of good family and education were able to pass. An applicant for a position who had performed his military service was usually preferred to one who had not, perhaps more because of the assumed superior physical and disciplinary training than because of the advantage of military qualifications. Conscription was generally looked upon as a most important measure of public hygiene, a salutary institution in every way. It insured a satisfactory minimum of physical training, bearing and discipline of the male population of Germany capable of carrying arms. Prince Bülow, former Imperial Chancellor and an unquestioned authority on political affairs and currents in Germany, has written that conscription was the only bond capable of uniting the German tribes and factions with their seemingly ineradicable proneness to petty disputes and quarrels.

It is manifest that the non-enforcement of conscription since the Armistice, and its abolition since then by Federal act, have

created a noticeable gap in German public life which thoughtful men are solicitous of refilling. A form of national labor conscription has been seriously suggested, but the organization of such a gigantic scheme requires so much study and reflection that the plan is merely in its incipency. The late Secretary of State, Erzberger, proposed a compulsory civil service of one year for the German youth. The idea of compulsory civil service is a development of the so-called Hindenburg system of compulsory auxiliary service established during the war, a system which aimed at the complete mobilization of the labor forces of the Fatherland with a view to the successful prosecution of the war.

In the absence of conscription the value of athletic sports for the training of the German youth has become greatly enhanced since the Armistice, although it is feared by many that they can never replace conscription because of the lack of the element of compulsion. A bill has now been submitted to the Reichstag which would make it compulsory for German boys to participate in some form of athletic sports, an intense cultivation of which is one of the outstanding features of the Germany of to-day. It was not until the War had been in progress for some time that the German military authorities began to see the importance of athletic sports. A special department for the supervision of athletics was established in the Prussian War Ministry and an organization for the coördination of physical training to meet the requirements of the German army was perfected.

Before the war there were 400,000 enrolled members of German sport clubs. To-day the corresponding figure is 2,500,000, to which must be added over a million *Turners*, so that over 3,500,000 young Germans are now registered as actively engaged in some form of athletics. The number is constantly increasing.

Athletic sports have now penetrated even the staid German universities. For the first time games were played last year for the academic football championship of Germany. The high schools and academies as such do not take up athletic sports at all. Boys and girls who engage in athletics do so as members of local clubs. For the general supervision of athletic activity there is a National Committee for Physical Training, which advises the Department of the Interior in pertinent matters. With the usual

German thoroughness a University of Physical Training has been opened in Berlin, where the scientific and technical sides of athletic exercises are studied and men and women are trained to become athletic instructors.

The situation of the German youth to-day is one of bitter hostility between two powerful extremes. A pronounced inclination towards civil war is manifest, for there is no strong centre which could reconcile and pacify the differences between Nationalism and Internationalism, as the issue has unfortunately been defined to be. In reality the issue is between chauvinism and sane Nationalism. The elements in favor of a victory of Democracy are the educating force of at least the forms of democratic government, the self-alienation of the reactionary youth from the people at large, and perhaps most of all the liberalizing influence of athletic sports. The elements in favor of a victory of the reaction are: tradition; preponderance of influence in the administration of justice and in academic life; a powerful and unscrupulous press; and a well organized and hitherto highly effective monarchist propaganda. Inertia works in favor of the reaction; national distress is likewise its ally. In point of numbers alone the Democratic and Socialist Youth are not at a disadvantage; in influence and resource they are severely handicapped.

The Monarchists have wisely refrained thus far from any public discussion of questions of dynasty, well knowing that the former German dynasties are so jealous of prerogative and rank that agreement on the bearer of a new Imperial crown would be difficult if not impossible. The aspirations of the House of Wittelsbach, the former ruling dynasty of Bavaria, would not be so easily set aside as in the time of Bismarck in 1871, and a Bavarian Kaiser would scarcely be relished by the domineering North Germans. A quiet propaganda in favor of the ex-Crown Prince has been in evidence for some time; Prince Eitel Friedrich, the second son of ex-Kaiser William, shows himself occasionally in monarchist demonstrations; and the eldest son of the ex-Crown Prince is sometimes spoken of as the future Kaiser; but aside from this the question of candidacy for the throne is kept studiously in the background.

The Nationalist Youth is looking backward; it has brought

forth no new ideas and aspires merely to the restoration on an improved basis of the régime built up by an older generation which failed and seeks yet to retrieve itself if given another chance. The young reactionaries fail to see that they are being made the tools of a disappointed faction which hopes to return to power and is prompted in its efforts by purely selfish motives. The campaign of the reactionaries is ruthless and unscrupulous; disdain for the republican institutions is paired with complete indifference to the welfare of the whole people. A powerful press daily pours out a torrent of abuse of the institutions of government and the persons in power which would not be tolerated for a moment in any other country. The aim of the reactionaries is primarily destructive; it is tantamount to sabotage of the Republic.

The democratic thinking youth looks forward, is constructive, and, mindful of the inherent defects and the definite failure of the old régime, aims at the regeneration of the nation on a sound Liberal basis. What is needed most of all is enlightenment on the sane nationalism of democracy and the fatal folly of chauvinism and a policy of revenge. A basis of sane nationalism must be found to which all, or the great majority, must commit themselves, or the Fatherland will drift into civil war. The lethargy of the political parties on which the responsibility for the preservation of the Republic rests is inexplicable and inexcusable. The assassination of Erzberger had the effect of illuminating like a flash of lightning the precarious situation of the Republic. It remains to be seen whether the lesson will be thoroughly learned and adequate steps be taken to meet the reactionary menace.

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